

Texas (Mr. RODRIGUEZ) for his outstanding and exemplary work in the Congress for the past 8 years, and he certainly has put veterans first. So again I want to thank him for his work as well.

Mr. REYES. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of S. 2486, the Veteran's Benefits Improvement Act of 2004. I would like to thank my colleagues for bringing it to the floor for a vote.

As you may know, S. 2486 would expand educational and housing benefits to qualified veterans and their dependents. With the rise in cost for educational services and home loans, our Nation's veterans are required to supplement the high costs through loans that can become financially burdensome. With the expansion of these two benefits, we can better ensure they are given the opportunity of continuing their education and purchasing their own home.

In addition, I am glad to see the inclusion of important language to provide housing and automobile benefits to veterans disabled by VA medical treatment or vocational rehabilitation. As you may know, I am a sponsor of H.R. 843 which aims to address this same issue by providing full service-connected disability to persons injured while under the care of the Department of Veterans Affairs. Although this bill does not provide full service-connected disability to injured persons, I am certainly glad to see this piece of legislation included in the bill.

I believe this bill will provide them with the resources needed to fulfil their dreams and long term goals for education and home ownership. In addition, this legislation will solidify the care for our veterans welfare and health while under the care of the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Mr. Speaker, I strongly urge my colleagues to support the passage of this important bill.

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. MICHAUD. Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. SMITH) that the House suspend the rules and pass the Senate bill, S. 2486.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds having voted in favor thereof) the rules were suspended and the Senate bill was passed.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days within which to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on S. 2486, the Senate bill just passed.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from New Jersey?

There was no objection.

VETERANS HEALTH PROGRAMS IMPROVEMENT ACT OF 2004

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules

and concur in the Senate amendments to the bill (H.R. 3936) to amend title 38, United States Code, to authorize the principal office of the United States Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims to be at any location in the Washington, DC, metropolitan area, rather than only in the District of Columbia, and expressing the sense of Congress that a dedicated Veterans Courthouse and Justice Center should be provided for that Court and those it serves and should be located, if feasible, at a site owned by the United States that is part of or proximate to the Pentagon Reservation, and for other purposes.

The Clerk read as follows:

Senate amendments:

Strike out all after the enacting clause and insert:

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE; TABLE OF CONTENTS.

(a) *SHORT TITLE.*—This Act may be cited as the “Veterans Health Programs Improvement Act of 2004”.

(b) *TABLE OF CONTENTS.*—The table of contents of this Act is as follows:

Sec. 1. Short title; table of contents.

Sec. 2. Reference to title 38, United States Code.

TITLE I—ASSISTANCE TO HOMELESS VETERANS

Sec. 101. Authorization of appropriations.

TITLE II—VETERANS LONG-TERM CARE PROGRAMS

Sec. 201. Assistance for hiring and retention of nurses at State veterans' homes.

Sec. 202. Treatment of Department of Veterans Affairs per diem payments to State homes for veterans.

Sec. 203. Extension of authority to provide care under long-term care pilot programs.

Sec. 204. Prohibition on collection of copayments for hospice care.

TITLE III—MEDICAL CARE

Sec. 301. Sexual trauma counseling program.

Sec. 302. Centers for research, education, and clinical activities on complex multi-trauma associated with combat injuries.

Sec. 303. Enhancement of medical preparedness of Department of Veterans Affairs.

TITLE IV—MEDICAL FACILITIES MANAGEMENT AND ADMINISTRATION

Subtitle A—Major Medical Facility Leases

Sec. 401. Major medical facility leases.

Sec. 402. Authorization of appropriations.

Sec. 403. Authority for long-term lease of certain lands of University of Colorado.

Subtitle B—Facilities Management

Sec. 411. Department of Veterans Affairs Capital Asset Fund.

Sec. 412. Annual report to Congress on inventory of Department of Veterans Affairs historic properties.

Sec. 413. Authority to acquire and transfer real property for use for homeless veterans.

Sec. 414. Limitation on implementation of mission changes for specified Veterans Health Administration facilities.

Sec. 415. Authority to use project funds to construct or relocate surface parking incidental to a construction or nonrecurring maintenance project.

Sec. 416. Inapplicability of limitation on use of advance planning funds to authorized major medical facility projects.

Sec. 417. Improvements to enhanced-use lease authority.

Sec. 418. First option for Commonwealth of Kentucky on Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center, Louisville, Kentucky.

Sec. 419. Transfer of jurisdiction, General Services Administration property, Boise, Idaho.

Subtitle C—Designation of Facilities

Sec. 421. Thomas E. Creek Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center.

Sec. 422. James J. Peters Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center.

Sec. 423. Bob Michel Department of Veterans Affairs Outpatient Clinic.

Sec. 424. Charles Wilson Department of Veterans Affairs Outpatient Clinic.

Sec. 425. Thomas P. Noonan, Jr. Department of Veterans Affairs Outpatient Clinic.

TITLE V—PERSONNEL ADMINISTRATION

Sec. 501. Pilot program to study innovative recruitment tools to address nursing shortages at Department of Veterans Affairs health care facilities.

Sec. 502. Technical correction to listing of certain hybrid positions in Veterans Health Administration.

Sec. 503. Under Secretary for Health.

TITLE VI—OTHER MATTERS

Sec. 601. Extension and codification of authority for recovery audits.

Sec. 602. Inventory of medical waste management activities at Department of Veterans Affairs health care facilities.

Sec. 603. Inclusion of all enrolled veterans among persons eligible to use canteens operated by Veterans' Canteen Service.

Sec. 604. Annual reports on waiting times for appointments for specialty care.

Sec. 605. Technical clarification.

SEC. 2. REFERENCE TO TITLE 38, UNITED STATES CODE.

Except as otherwise expressly provided, whenever in this Act an amendment or repeal is expressed in terms of an amendment to, or repeal of, a section or other provision, the reference shall be considered to be made to a section or other provision of title 38, United States Code.

TITLE I—ASSISTANCE TO HOMELESS VETERANS

SEC. 101. AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.

Section 2013 is amended in paragraph (4) by striking “\$75,000,000” and inserting “\$99,000,000”.

TITLE II—VETERANS LONG-TERM CARE PROGRAMS

SEC. 201. ASSISTANCE FOR HIRING AND RETENTION OF NURSES AT STATE VETERANS' HOMES.

(a) *IN GENERAL.*—(1) Chapter 17 is amended by inserting after section 1743 the following new section:

“§1744. Hiring and retention of nurses: payments to assist States

“(a) *PAYMENT PROGRAM.*—The Secretary shall make payments to States under this section for the purpose of assisting State homes in the hiring and retention of nurses and the reduction of nursing shortages at State homes.

“(b) *ELIGIBLE RECIPIENTS.*—Payments to a State for a fiscal year under this section shall, subject to submission of an application, be made to any State that during that fiscal year—

“(1) receives per diem payments under this subchapter for that fiscal year; and

“(2) has in effect an employee incentive scholarship program or other employee incentive program at a State home designed to promote the hiring and retention of nursing staff and to reduce nursing shortages at that home.